

Decline in *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* but not *E. coli* O157 isolation rates in FoodNet sites: Farm, food, or fluctuation?

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Foodborne diseases are common in the United States. Salmonellosis, *Campylobacteriosis* and *E. coli* O157 infections frequently associated with meat and poultry products are among the most common bacterial foodborne infections. To characterize foodborne illness better and monitor changes more precisely the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet) conducts active surveillance for laboratory isolations of *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *E. coli* O157 and other foodborne pathogens in California. Connecticut. Georgia. Maryland. Minnesota. New York and Oregon. To identify isolations surveillance personnel contact each clinical laboratory in their catchment areas either weekly or monthly depending on the size of the clinical laboratory from 1996 to 1998 in the five sites reporting data from each of these years overall isolation rates of the pathogens under surveillance declined. The largest decrease in bacterial pathogen-specific isolation rates occurred in *Salmonella* (14.5/100,000 to 12.6/100,000, a 13% decline). The decrease was largely due to a pronounced decline in isolations of *Salmonella* serotype Enteritidis which dropped 44% from 2.5/100,000 to 1.4/100,000. *Campylobacter* isolation rates fluctuated but fell 8% (21.5/100,000 to 21.7/100,000) overall from 1996 to 1998 driven mostly by a sharp decline in California. Rates of isolation of *E. coli* O157 however showed little net change during this period. Ongoing studies will help explain these changes more fully; presently, several potential explanations exist. For example, declines noted might reflect simple annual fluctuations or might be a result of changes in clinical or laboratory practice. Also, recent changes in the meat poultry, and egg industries (e.g. as a result of the USDA Pathogen Reduction/Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points program) might account for some of this decline. This possibility is supported by reported declines in the percentage of meat and poultry products testing positive for *Salmonella* paralleling the decline in *Salmonella* isolations in FoodNet.

Suggested citation:

Van Gilder T, Vugia D, Fiorentino T, Segler S, Carter M, Smith K, Morse D, Cassidy M, Angulo F. Decline in *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* but not *E. coli* O157 isolation rates in FoodNet sites: Farm, food, or fluctuation? 37th Annual Meeting of the Infectious Disease Society of America, Philadelphia, PA, November 1999.